

Planting and growing garlic

Garlic should be planted during the last week of Sept. or the first week of Oct, (that is here in Va.) If you are further north , a couple of weeks earlier, further south a bit later. Garlic requires a well drained, fertile soil and it is vital that it be in full sun and have a ph of 6.5-7.0. An assessment of your proposed site will be necessary to check for drainage but a soil test is of the utmost importance. Why go to all the trouble of planting garlic only to have the wrong soil. Your crops will not grow, or be stunted and all your time, work and money will be wasted. The local Ag. Extension Dept. can help you with the soil test.

Seed clove should be ordered in July or August for shipment in Sept. Seed clove is available from many national producers but due to the weight and shipping costs I suggest you purchase from a grower in your region. I do not suggest buying garlic at the grocery store- it is usually treated with a growth inhibitor to keep it from sprouting.

There are dozens of varieties of garlic, we grow 4 types. The two garlics I am going to discuss are Elephant and Spanish Roja.

Elephant garlic, while not a true garlic- it is in the leek family, is a very large fisted bulb, very mild and great for roasting. The cloves should be planted 8"-10" apart , in 36" wide rows. The cloves should be planted in hills, point up and then covered with 4"of soil. Within a month of planting , usually in Oct., the garlic will sprout and the blades will break the surface. If there is no rain after planting, irrigation will be necessary so that you will have blades before the beginning of winter. This will be your indication the garlic is setting roots and will be growing over the winter. After the first frost be sure to mulch your rows , 4-6" , with straw to prevent the bulbs from heaving during the winter. Since we are organic, our fertilizer consists of a cover crop churned under prior to planting and a drench with fish fertilizer in the planting trench. In March we top dress again with a fish emulsion. It is a heavy feeder so for large cloves fertilization is a must.

Spanish Roja, one of the hottest garlics, is quite small but is packed with flavor, and is great for general cooking or even raw in salads. The Roja also requires good drainage but because it is a good bit smaller can be planted on flat ground. We plant the seed cloves about 4" apart , stagger them so that we have 4 rows within the same 36" wide rows. The greenery is so much smaller that there is plenty of room for this method of planting. This garlic will sprout a good deal quicker than the elephant and the greenery should be present within a couple of weeks. At this point, if you wish, you can clip some of the green blades and use them in salads. In the restaurant trade this is referred to as green garlic. Whether you choose to cut or not be sure to leave some greenery above ground. We do not mulch our true garlic. Since they are fully underground we don't have the freezing and heaving problem, (mulch at your discretion). However irrigation is just as important for Roja, as any other garlic. Any of these bulb crops need a good start before winter and if rain is not present within a week of planting, irrigate your plantings. Once you have mulched (your choice), your beds will not require you until spring when the top growth makes a strong showing. At that time, weeding is of the utmost importance. You either grow garlic or weeds, not both. Also water will be necessary, weekly, if there is no rain and a topdressing of a nitrogen rich fertilizer will be required.

Harvesting garlic is a process all to itself. A lot of work and a lot of odor, but it's worth it. Remember garlic is a perfect crop. It grows all winter , takes little upkeep during the bulk of it's growing season and the deer don't eat it. The fact that it is very labor intensive upon planting and harvesting is something I tend to overlook because of the downtime in between.
Following are some tips
